

REMARKS

Applicant's attorney gratefully acknowledges the interview granted by Examiner Robinson on April 28, 2006.

While no specific agreement was reached at that interview as to what specific language could be added to the claims to render them allowable over the art of record, a general consensus was reached between the Examiner and the undersigned attorney that the novel aspects of the present invention reside primarily in the manner that the bracket of the vehicle mirror assembly, in combination with a mirror visor having a mechanically independent visor cover and visor rim, facilitates manufacture of the assembly by (1) obviating the need for multiple jigs to accommodate differently shaped mirror visors, and (2) reducing the chances of scratches occurring on the surface of the mirror visor from the manufacturing jig. These problems, and the solutions brought by the invention, are specifically discussed on pages 2-4 of the specification.

To better emphasize these novel aspects, apparatus claims 1-6 having been cancelled, and method claims 7-21 have been revised to more clearly distinguish the invention from the art of record. Additionally, new apparatus claims 22-23 have been added which recite the manufacturing advantages of the invention in means plus function language.

Claim 7 now specifically recites a method for assembling a vehicle mirror assembly wherein the assembly includes a mirror, a mirror visor "having a visor cover..., a visor rim that is separate and independent from the visor cover ...", a retracting unit having a "plate-like" stand, and a bracket "that is separate and independent from said retracting unit...", comprising the steps of "mounting the visor rim to one surface of the bracket", and "mounting the visor cover to one of the other surface of the bracket and the visor rim from the other side of the bracket..."

By contrast, the Sakata '050 patent specifically discloses a housing 220 which comprises a one-piece mirror visor that integrally combines a visor cover and a visor rim, as well as a retracting unit 250 having a rotating portion 250 formed from a member 254 that "consists of a cover 2541 and extension 2542" (see col. 27, line 25-26). Thus there is no separation between the visor cover and visor rim in the Sakata '050 patent, nor any separation between the retracting unit and a support bracket accommodated within the mirror visor. These differences are critical in view of the principal object of the present invention, which is to provide both a mirror assembly and a method for assembling a mirror assembly that obviates the need for separate bracket jigs to accommodate differently-shaped visor covers, as described in lines 2-5 on page 3 of the present specification. For this reason alone, claim 7 is patentable over the Sakata '050 patent. But there are other reasons as well. Amended claim 7 requires that (1) the rotating portion of the retracting unit must be attached to the bracket, (2) the visor rim must then be mounted onto one surface of the bracket, and finally, (3) the visor cover must be mounted to the other surface of the bracket. Clearly, the Sakata '050 patent neither discloses or remotely suggests these steps, as there is no bracket that is separate and independent from the retracting unit, nor a mirror visor having a visor cover, and a visor rim that is separate and independent from the visor cover. These structural differences make the recited method steps impossible to carry out in the context of the Sakata '050 rearview mirror system. For all these reasons, claim 7 is clearly patentable over the Sakata '050 patent.

Claim 7 is likewise patentable over the Polzer '480 patent. There is no retracting unit having the recited "plate-like stand" either disclosed or remotely suggested in the Polzer '480 patent. Even more clearly, there is no retracting unit having a rotating portion "completely contained within said mirror visor". By contrast, the arm-like extension 10 of Polzer extends completely outside of the housing 4 and cap 7, as illustrated in Figure 2 of the '480 patent. Finally, Polzer is completely silent with respect to the method of assembly of the rearview mirror. Hence there is no disclosure or suggestion of the recited method steps. For all these reasons, claim 7 is clearly patentable over the Polzer '480 patent.

Moreover, amended claim 7 is patentable over any tenable combination of these references. The method of claim 7 cannot be disclosed or suggested by these references without the structure recited in the preamble of claim 7. And in order to for the rearview mirror disclosed in the Sakata '050 patent to be modified into the mirror assembly constructed by the method of the invention, there must be some motivation, teaching or incentive either within the Sakata '050 or the Polzer '480 patent to split the housing 220 into the combination of a visor cover and a visor rim, as well as to change the structure of the retracting unit 250 into a retracting unit having a plate-like stand and a rotating portion completely contained within the mirror visor. There must further be some motivation, teaching or incentive to make the retracting unit separate and independent from the bracket. The Sakata '050 patent clearly teaches against such modifications. The problem that the Sakata '050 patent seeks to solve is set forth on column 2, lines 34-40 as follows:

“For manufacture of the positioning units, it is not only necessary to prepare, check and manage many molding dyes and jigs but also to manage many types of manufactured parts and many finished positioning units. Namely, the manufacture of the rearview mirrors needs large costs.”

To solve this problem, the Sakata '050 patent teaches a rearview mirror system that comprises a plurality of base-housing sets “adapted for a variety of car body styles, ...” (see col. 2, lines 46-48). Thus, this patent teaches standardization and integration of parts. To this end, the one-piece housing 220 “is designed like a shallow box open at the front thereof ... apart from the opening 220, studs 223 to which the positioning unit 250 is to be fixed are formed in a rear wall 225 ... the studs 223 are designed in the form of a cylinder in which a screw hole is made ...” (see col. 26, lines 59-67). To the extent that the '050 patent teaches anything like a rigidifying bracket, it teaches extending the housing of the positioning unit 250 as follows:

“The member 254 [of the positioning unit 250] consists of a cover 2541 and extension 2542 ... the extension 2542 has the general form of a shallow box

and is formed integrally with the cover 2541 as projected outwardly from the lateral side of the cover 2541 [see col. 27, lines 25-43]. The extension 2542 is secured to the studs 223 of the housing 220 with screws 288 [see col. 29, lines 19-21].

Clearly, such structure and assembly is incompatible with a separate mirror housing 4 and cap 7 structure taught in the Polzer '480 patent, as it is a simpler process to install a positioning unit 250 having a cover extension 2542 to a unitary housing 220 via screws 288, than it would be to assemble a separate support plate to a two-piece housing, which would necessarily involve more manufacturing steps. In short, as the Sakata '050 patent teaches the use of standardized and simplified parts which may be assembled with the minimum of steps, it is fundamentally inconsistent with any teaching in the Polzer '480 patent to either split the housing into a separate rim and cap, or to provide a separate support bracket in lieu of the extension 2542 of the positioning unit cover. Accordingly, amended claim 1 is patentable over any tenable combination of these references, as the references fail to suggest either a structure that the method of claim 7 may be applied to, much less the method itself.

Claims 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 are all allowable not only for their ultimate dependency upon amended claim 7, but for their recitation of manipulation steps of the bracket or a bracket jig that are clearly neither disclosed or suggested by the art of record.

Independent claim 15 has been amended in substantially the same manner as previously dismissed claim 7. Accordingly, claim 15 is patentable for all the reasons given with respect to claim 7.

Claims 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 are patentable not only for their ultimate dependency on claim 15, but for the reasons given with respect to claims 3, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Claims 21 includes all the limitations of amended claim 7, plus limitations directed toward manipulating the bracket relative to a bracket jig. Claim 21 further recites the method of the invention in sequential steps, whereas the references, (to the extent that they suggest

any steps), do not suggest any particular order to the steps of manufacture. Hence, all the arguments presented in support of the patentability of claim 7 apply with even greater force to claim 21.

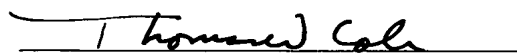
New device claims 22 and 23 recite all the structural limitations of method claim 7, as well as a "bracket means for facilitating manufacturing" which is clearly neither disclosed nor suggested by the art of record. Accordingly, these claims are patentable over the prior art.

Finally, new claims 24 and 25 are patentable not only for their dependency on claim 7 and 15, but for their recitation that the method steps are "sequential".

Now that all the claims are believed to be allowable, the prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowance is hereby earnestly solicited.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any overage or shortage of fees connected with filing of this Amendment to Deposit Account No. 19-2380.

Respectfully submitted,
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